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ABSTRACT

There is little provision in the average high school for the evaluation of students with learning and behavior problems. The new master plan for Special Education in California calls for at least two levels of assessment, one to be implemented in a school appraisal team, including teachers, program and resource specialists, and an administrator. More serious problems are to be referred to an educational assessment service that provides specialized evaluation by psychologists, physicians, and other professionals. For the first time it seems that some real consideration is being given toward providing a built-in system at the school level for assessment of student academic skills as the need becomes apparent. It seems logical that such a comprehensive evaluation procedure should be an integral part of any educational setting which attempts to deal with students as individuals. (Author)

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STUDENT ASSESSMENT SERVICE:

A MODEL FOR ASSESSMENT OF

LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

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STUDENT ASSESSMENT SERVICE: A MODEL FOR ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

There is little provision in the average high school for the evaluation of students with learning and behavior problems. Usually, high school students are given state-prescribed group tests, the results of which are posted on records but otherwise ignored. Some students are referred for remedial reading programs and may receive some standardized and/or teacher-made tests in that setting. However, the test results tend to be used only in the reading classes. A few students are referred for special education programs and are then tested by the school psychologist, with results again used only in the special classes that are designed to recognize and deal with the student's needs.

The new Master Plan for Special Education in California calls for at least two levels of assessment, one to be implemented in a school appraisal team, including teachers, program and resource specialists, and an administrator. More serious problems are to be referred to an educational assessment service that provides specialized evaluation by psychologists, physicians, and other professionals. For the first time it seems that some real consideration is being given toward providing a built-in system at the school level for assessment of student academic skills as the need becomes apparent. It seems logical that such a comprehensive evaluation procedure should be an integral part of any educational setting which attempts to deal with students as individuals.

The team approach appears to be a particularly happy solution to the problem of evaluation in the high school setting. In the elementary school one teacher takes primary responsibility for working with a child for the entire school year. Although other teaching patterns may spread responsibility, the typical elementary school is small. Each student has high visibility, and teachers tend to know a great deal about their students. In contrast, high schools are large and departmentalized, with no staff member in a position to observe the student's behavior in the total school program. The high school student's program is in fact discontinuous, and the student is expected to adapt, at specific time intervals, to a wide variety of learning environments. The teenager who cannot make the necessary adaptation becomes a "behavior problem," so identified by the counselor from teacher reports of resistant or aggressive behavior, truancy, or refusal to comply with academic requirements.

However, a close look at most of the so-called "problem" students reveals apparently paradoxical behaviors. Students described as lazy and rebellious in some classes are productive and cooperative in others. In fact, the trend in education toward recognition of diverse student needs, interests, and goals has helped schools to become more aware of students as individuals. An increasing number of schools have moved to provide a number of alternative programs within the academic structure.

Troy High School: Troy Learning Center

The Fullerton (California) Union High School District has developed a number of individualized instructional programs, continuous progress

evaluation in many areas, work experience programs, and a wide range of course offerings providing new opportunities for academic exploration beyond the confines of the traditional program. Troy High School has been particularly noted for innovative approaches to educational problems. Nevertheless the Troy staff has continued to observe unhappy, defiant young people who have resisted all available options in the instructional program. These students have been perhaps more visible at Troy than they would have been elsewhere simply because the careful attention given to individuals on this campus has increased staff awareness of student difficulties and desires.

Five years ago a special program was established within the school to try to provide for young people whose needs were still not being met, even in an extremely flexible and individualized curriculum. Project Succeed was initially designed as a system for monitoring student progress and unifying the student support services in the school, consolidating and focusing their assistance efforts. A second function was the provision of learning alternatives for students not succeeding in regular course work. Students gained units in a variety of subjects, working at their own rates on materials selected with their interests and skill levels in mind.

The fact that the program was funded from existing budget categories limited expenditures and made it necessary to explore other alternatives for staffing and materials. Thus, a strategy emerged for involving community volunteers, peer tutors, college students, and other resource persons. Support from the rest of the school staff was indicated by a number of faculty members volunteering some portion of their conference periods to work with students in the program.

During the second year of Project Succeed, attention was centered on the development of internal learning situations which involved student needs and interests. As the staff in Project Succeed began to know their students, they became aware that the young people in the program exhibited an astonishing variety of problems not listed by the referring teachers and administrators. Truancy and refusal to complete classroom assignments often masked serious deficiencies in basic skills. Some students were hyperactive and easily distracted. Others demonstrated interests and goals not remotely related to the high school curriculum. Still others seemed given to inappropriate comments, hostile or erratic behavior, and seemed generally "odd" or "peculiar."

It became evident that a systematic procedure for assessment was necesary. Instead of referring students piecemeal to the school psychologist and then waiting until they could be fitted into a pre-committed schedule, it seemed that informal assessment and concomitant placement should be available immediately for any student hhose performance indicated serious deficits in skills which precluded success in the regular program and suggested the possibility of a need for special education. It became increasingly obvious that the students in Project Succeed had a great deal in common with those in the special education program for the educationally handicapped. In fact, Project Succeed evaluations turned up most of the previously unidentified EH students.

As a result, a curriculum proposal was designed and approved for development in the summer of 1973. The proposal outlined a hierarchy of

assessment procedures on the principle of successive sieves. Three levels of testing were described, the first two to be completed by the Project Succeed staff members, with the final level requiring parent permission and the involvement of the school psychologist. The screening procedure made it possible to assess any student quickly and determine whether any special placement was warranted or whether further assessment by the school psychologist was required.

During the 1973-74 school year Project Succeed began to implement the testing procedures developed during the previous summer. Students applied for enrollment in Project Succeed classes or were referred by teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, or friends.

Each student was given a Level I screening assessment. Both oral interview and written material was obtained from the student in an effort to obtain information about his interests, oral and written expressive abilities, and his own perception of his problems. If learning problems or social/emotional conflicts were evident in this first screening level of evaluation, then the student was referred for Level II testing, where diagnostic evaluations were done in reading, arithmetic, or other skill areas. Other input concerning behavior was obtained from teachers, administrators, and self-report techniques. If the student showed indications of severe learning disabilities or significant emotional or behavior problems, he was then referred for Level III evaluation. The Level III evaluation utilized the familiar tools of the school psychologist but on a selective basis. Categories for evaluation were selected as indicated by weaknesses diagnosed

in Level I and Level II testing. Test results were used to provide additional information for prescriptive teaching, to suggest behavior management and motivational strategies for staff and parents, and to serve as a basis for referral to professionals in the community for additional services not provided in the school.

The Diagnostic Team, including the school psychologist, counselor(s), members of the teaching staff and aides met regularly to admit students to the program and to assess the progress of those who were already enrolled.

This year, additional opportunities are available to Troy students. The Master Plan for Special Education emphasizes the need for teaching students with learning handicaps according to the nature of specific disabilities rather than by categorical labels. Since Project Succeed identified a number of students with learning problems who could not be considered for EH classes for a variety of reasons, several classes have been developed to provide prescriptive teaching methods usually found only in classes for the educationally handicapped. This year the EH program is working in tandem with the Project Succeed program, now renamed the Troy Learning Center, to provide a coordinated program of intensive prescriptive education for students who lack normal academic skills. The Administrative staff works cooperatively with the Troy Learning Center team to provide support and further resources. Contact with probation officers, community treatment centers, district special education resources, and private medical consultants has greatly enhanced the effectiveness of the program. The program has close ties with school work experience programs, Regional Occupational Programs,

and the State Department of Vocational Rehabilitation to provide entry into a variety of work related and career preparation activities.

The school psychologist functions as an integral part of the total team, with the freedom to become involved at the request of any of the other staff members in developing approaches to individual student problems, training staff members to observe and evaluate student behavior, and working to implement procedures to achieve objectives and long-range goals.

The original Diagnostic Team, now formalized into a Student Assessment Service, continues to meet weekly to discuss options and make recommendations for new students and to provide follow-up on students already involved in Troy Learning Center programs.

The program has received considerable attention from other schools and districts in the area, and some of the procedures and assessment materials are now being implemented elsewhere.

Montclair High School: Student Resource Center

At Montclair High School in the Chaffey Union High School District, 56 sophomores were placed on "academic probation" as a result of a deficiency in credits earned in lower-division work. In the course of devising strategies to assist these students, it was necessary to find out why they were not succeeding with regular course work. Initial assumptions were that they were poor readers whose attendance problems and poor motivation resulted in lack of academic progress.

By having them complete the assessment materials under the direction of the Student Resource Center Coordinator with the help of peer counselors,

quite another profile emerged. First, although some of the students demonstrated low reading skills, the mean score on the word recognition test was 6.8 grade level--high enough to eliminate reading as the prime cause for failure since academic courses at Montclair are arranged on a tracking system which gears required coursework to a variety of reading levels. Then, while attendance had been a problem for some of the students, the average number of absences for the first quarter of their sophomore year fell within the normal range for the entire sophomore class--nore were referrals for discipline problems nor special education placement disproportionate.

The interest and experience inventories disclosed that these students were interested in a wide variety of topics, were well-traveled (several had traveled outside the United States and Mexico), and as sophomores, had already experienced a number of different occupation training programs and jobs which were much more sophisticated than lawn mowing and baby sitting.

What was most striking about the assessment was that so many different sub-groups were represented in the sample. If a remediation program had been designed based on the initial assumptions, it might have had no greater impact than the regular school program in which these students have failed. Instead, by providing specific data about the nature of the difficulties experienced by these students, a program with a number of instructional options are in the planning stages.

In an attempt to streamline the reporting of the assessment packet data, a profile has been devised to represent the range of responses in each of the assessment areas. Although a great deal of work remains to be done before

the linear representation demonstrates appropriate relationships between the topics represented in the packet, it appears at this time that such a descriptive device can effectively summarize the information produced by the assessment instruments and permit a more efficient use of the data that is collected.

Ninth graders at Montclair who are presently failing in two or more classes will be given the assessment during fall semester, 1976, as a part of initial pre-academic probation conferencing, in an attempt to discover techniques for preventing their eventual academic probation placement. Via regularly scheduled faculty seminars, the teachers of these students will be made aware of the nature of each student's difficulty. The preliminary assessment by Student Resource Center staff, conferencing by counselors, and faculty involvement may significantly reduce the number of students who otherwise would fail to earn 20 semester hours of credit during fall semester. Although not every student's potential failure can be prevented by altering the nature of classroom activities, the awareness on the part of the staff may supply the encouragement that will permit the individual to cope more effectively with the problems faced outside of the school setting. Until we are willing to find out <u>why</u> students fail, we can not hope to devise adequate prevention measures.

APPENDIX I

ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

TROY LEARNING CENTER

LEVEL I

DESCRIPTION: An initial test battery to be administered to all Troy Learning Center applicants. The battery is designed to be administered and evaluated by regular classroom teachers and/or trained and supervised teacher aides.

OBJECTIVES:

A. To estimate the basic academic skills of each student applicant; to define each student's interests, both academic and non-academic; to determine each student's attitude toward school as well as his perception of his own abilities and past academic performance. The results of these tests will be used:

(1) to estimate instructional levels for specific areas of instruction;

(2) to provide high-interest materials for instruction;

(3) to select materials and teaching strategies designed to encourage academic success.

B. To isolate specific and observable learning and/or behavioral problems which may indicate the presence of some learning disability and/or emotional or behavioral disturbances which may require additional testing, i.e. Levels II and III.

APPENDIX I

LEVEL II

DESCRIPTION: Three classifications of tests designed to be administrered selectively to students who exhibit general learning or behavior difficulties in Level I testing.

OBJECTIVES:

A. To define individual achievement levels in specified areas of language skills, quantitative and/or social skills. The results of these tests will be used:

(1) to define precise instructional levels for those areas of instruction;

(2) to provide for the selection of appropriate materials for instruction;

(3) to select teaching strategies for individual students which will result in improved skill performance for that student;

(4) to provide information useful to the counselor, student, parents, and psychologist concerning interests, attitudes, and concerns which affect academic and social adjustment.

B. To isolate specific observable learning or behavioral problems which may indicate the presence of some learning disability and/or emotional or behavioral disturbance which may require further analysis, i.e. Level III tests.

APPENDIX I

LEVEL III

DESCRIPTION: Tests or portions of tests classified by categories for in-depth evaluation of learning and/or behavioral disorders. Selection of a test or tests from specific categories shall be based upon those difficulties suggested by Level II test results. These tests will be administrered by or under the supervision of the school psychologist. Parent permission is required. Results are interpreted to parents, who are given a testing summary and copies of recommendations and objectives.

OBJECTIVES:

A. To identify specific learning and/or behavioral disorders; to determine strengths and weaknesses in individual learning patterns. The results of these tests will be used:
   (1) to identify and describe teaching techniques which capitalize on individual strengths;
   (2) to refer the instructor to appropriate materials for remediation of weaknesses;
   (3) to recommend aptitude related course selection;
   (4) to suggest appropriate motivational and behavior management strategies to be implemented in the school and/or home;
   (5) to provide information useful to counselors, parents, and the student in vocational exploration.

B. To identify any learning and/or behavior disorders which indicate the need for medical and/or psychiatric/clinical psychological examinations.

APPENDIX II

OUTLINE OF ASSESSMENT MATERIALS

I. LEVEL I (Screening)

A. ORAL INTERVIEW
Includes:

- School Interests
- Social Interests
- Past Experiences
- Self-Perception
- Verbal Expression
- Motivation
- Values
- Social Perception

B. WRITTEN QUESTIONNAIRE
Includes:

- Self-Perception
- Written Expression
- Interests
- Attitudes
- Social Perception

C. SCREENING OBSERVATION
Includes:

- Motor Behavior
- Concentration
- Language
- Personality and Attitudes
- Goals
- Values

II. LEVEL II

A. LANGUAGE SKILLS
May Include:

- Word Recognition level
  (Test: WRAT Word Recognition)
- Sound-Symbol Association
  (Tests: Spelling Dictation
  Diagnostic Spelling)
- Reading Comprehension
  (Tests: Gates, Spache, Gilmore,
  Gray, Nelson, PIAT)

B. QUANTITATIVE SKILLS
May Include:

- Math Computation level
  (Test: WRAT Math)
- Math Application & Concepts
  (Tests: Stanford Achievement,
  PIAT, Noonan-Spradley)

C. SOCIAL SKILLS
May Include:

- Teacher Reports
- Self-Evaluation of Behavior
- Administrative Reports
- Counselor Reports

APPENDIX II

III. LEVEL III - Parent permission required. Tests to be given by or under the supervision of the school psychologist. Tests listed are examples of tests which may be selected from each category.

A. PERCEPTION
May Include:

Visual
Auditory
Tests:
Bender
Benton
ITPA
Wepman
WISC Performance Scale

B. COGNITION
May Include:

Reasoning
Abstract/Concrete
Time-Space
Tests:
WISC, WAIS
Binet
Leiter
Columbia
Raven

C. LANGUAGE
May Include:

Receptive
Integrative
Expressive
Tests:
ITPA
Picture Story Language Test
Peabody Picture Vocab.
WRAT Spelling
WISC Verbal Scales

D. MEMORY
May Include:

Visual (Recent/Remote)
Auditory (Recent/Remote)
Tests:
Bender Recall
Benton
Memory for Designs
Sentence Memory
Words Memory
Nursery Rhymes
Pledge of Allegiance

E. MOTOR
May Include:

Gross
Fine
Tests:
Psycho-Dev Check List
Minn. Form Board
Crawford Small Parts Dexterity
Handwriting Eval.

F. ORGANIZATION
May Include:

Planning
Speed
Tests:
WISC Performance Scale
Bender
Memory for Designs

G. SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT
May Include:

Inter-personal relationships
Self-concept
Tests:
Self-Concept Card Sort
Sentence Completion
House-Tree-Person

G., contd.

TAT
Draw A Person
MMPI
16 Personality FActors
Rorschach

ABSTRACT

STUDENT ASSESSMENT SERVICE: A MODEL FOR ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

Troy High School in Fullerton, California, has developed a learning alternatives program, the Troy Learning Center, which includes as an integral part of its program an assessment service provided by teachers, counselors, aides, and the school psychologist. Similar procedures and materials are also being used at Montclair High School in Montclair, California.

A three-level evaluation procedure is utilized, the first two levels to be completed by the Troy Learning Center staff members, with the final level requiring parent permission and the involvement of the school psychologist. The multi-level procedure has been designed to assess any student quickly and determine whether any special placement is warranted or whether further assessment by the school psychologist is required.

Level I of the Diagnostic Test Battery is an initial test battery to be administered to all students who are being considered for placement in any of the Troy Learning Center classes. Both oral interview and written material is obtained from the student in an effort to obtain information about his interests, oral and written expressive abilities and his own perception of his problems. If learning problems or social/emotional conflicts are evidenced in this first screening level of evaluation, then the student is referred for Level II testing, where diagnostic evaluations may be done in reading, arithmetic, or other skill areas. Other input concerning behavior may be obtained from teachers, administrators, and self-report techniques.

If the student shows indications of severe learning disabilities or significant emotional or behavior problems, he is then referred for Level III evaluation. The Level III evaluation utilizes the familiar tools of the school psychologist but on a selective basis. Categories for evaluation are selected as indicated by weaknesses diagnosed in Level I and Level II testing. Test results are utilized in working with staff and parents and as a basis for community referrals for additional services.

The Troy Learning Center program provides a number of alternatives to regular classroom instruction, including individually designed instructional programs, high interest and non-academic materials, learning disability remediation programs, and cooperative programs with various types of work experience.

The Student Assessment Service meets weekly to make recommendations for placement, and/or further evaluation, and to assess the progress of students already in the Troy Learning Center program. Additional support and resources are received from the school administrative staff, community treatment centers, probation facilities, and medical consultants.

A program using similar asseesment materials and procedures is under way at Montclair High School. Sophomore students presently on academic probation have been assessed and planning for an on-campus learning alternatives program is presently under way. Ninth graders, who are experiencing difficulty in the regular program, are being assessed. Group counseling and other preventative measures will be employed, based on initial assessment data.